

**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing Testimony
Friday, March 4th, 2011**

*Re: The Brain Injury Association of Connecticut as affected by H.B. No. 6380 AN ACT CONCERNING
THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2013.*

Good Evening Chairman Harp, Chairman Walker, Ranking Member Kane, and Appropriations Committee Membership. My name is Mike Castillo. I am a resident of Eastford, Connecticut. I am thankful for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition of the elimination of the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut's operating grant.

I am here tonight to urge you ladies and gentlemen to vote to continue the \$125,000 grant for the Brain Injury Association of Connecticut (BIAC). This grant is provided by the Department of Social Services under the line item "Services for Persons with Disabilities." To totally eliminate this grant will not only severely curtail BIAC's ability to provide services; it also will transfer that burden onto an already overloaded state system. This grant accounts for 20% of BIAC's entire budget. Without it, the Association would have to severely curtail services.

As you know, this organization has been contracted by the State of Connecticut to provide services to people with brain injuries and their families since 1984. BIAC provides essential services which the state government cannot provide, including resource facilitation, information, telephone support and outreach. Calls to their helpline alone have increased by over 600% in the past 5 years.

BIAC is an organization working as hard as they can within their limited operating budgets. When faced with significant losses 18 months ago, they reduced staff, moved offices for lower rent, and have made every kind of cut they can in order to keep these much-needed services going.

I am here tonight speaking on behalf of this organization because this is something that effects us all. You may be aware that March is Brain Injury Awareness Month. What signal is our governor sending our citizens by proposing to eliminate funding for brain injuries during Brain Injury Awareness Month? Is this what the disenfranchised members of our society can expect from our state over the next four years? Any one of us can suffer a brain injury at any time. We take the risk every time we drive our cars, ride horses or bicycles, play sports, clear snow off of our roofs or even work around the house. Near drowning and other accidents that involve the flow of oxygen to the brain may also result in brain injuries. We have seen in recent days terrible events like the shooting in Arizona which resulted in Representative Giffords traumatic brain injury.

The Veterans Affairs administration considers traumatic brain injuries to be the hallmark injury faced by Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Were you aware that there are currently no facilities in CT used by the VA to help our returning soldiers who have TBI's? The closest facilities are in Boston and New York City. If these soldiers or their families want treatment within the borders of our state they need services like what BIAC offers to help them. I am a veteran myself, and I can honestly say that when I returned home from Iraq, the last thing I would have ever wanted would be to receive treatment in another state for an injury I sustained while protecting the country I love. I would want to be here with my family who

patiently and courageously awaited my return, and I am grateful that there is a service like BIAC in CT to allow that for my brothers and sisters in arms who return home with brain injuries.

BIAC is the only organization in CT that exists solely to help people with brain injuries and their families navigate through a broken health care system and the bureaucratic red tape that accompanies so many brain injuries, helping these people to receive the treatment they need and get their lives back. I have witnessed the effects and complications of this system firsthand with my girlfriend's family. It is not something that anyone should have to go through. It is bad enough that the family and the loved one must work so hard to regain what was lost, but to force them to work through so much bureaucracy and unnecessary administrative hurdles in order to receive critical, time sensitive treatment is outrageous. BIAC serves to help in this regard so that people have at least somewhere to turn to in such a scary and unpredictable situation.

BIAC also helps improve our economic situation by reducing costs that would otherwise be passed on to the state via the Department of Social Services. How can we expect to just dump this burden entirely on DSS? DSS has no mechanism to handle resource facilitation calls. You are all well aware that DSS is already on over stretched agency. I really question the notion that we can save the state money by increasing state bureaucracy. Without the help of BIAC they will have to take on an increased caseload which will increase costs to the state and our taxpayers while lowering the quality of service provided

The Brain Injury Association of Connecticut is an organization dedicated to helping people with brain injuries become productive members of society and get their lives back. Cutting this funding is an attack on the people with brain injuries themselves, many of whom cannot stick up for themselves. In these difficult economic times, we all DO need to sacrifice, but how can we look each other in the eye when we bear the grunt of our own economic misfortune on some of the people who can do the least amount to better their situations? Total elimination of this funding will severely restrict BIAC's ability to respond to the needs of the community while costing the state money. As a veteran, I want to know that my fellow soldiers are taken care of when they return home; as a citizen, I want to know that I can be safely taken care of in the event of an emergency; as a taxpayer, I want to ensure that unnecessary costs, such as adding burdens to overworked state agencies can be avoided; and as a person, I think this is the right thing to do. We cannot turn our backs on people with brain injuries. They need us and they have no where else to go.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Mike Castillo